

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Multi-Species Conservation Strategy (MSCS) for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program (CALFED) is an approach that entities implementing CALFED actions may use to fulfill the requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act (FESA), California Endangered Species Act (CESA), and Natural Community Conservation Planning Act (NCCPA).

The MSCS features a two-tiered approach to FESA, CESA, and NCCPA compliance that corresponds to CALFED's two-tiered approach to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The MSCS provides a program-level evaluation of CALFED under FESA and NCCPA, just as the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Programmatic EIS/EIR) provides a program-level evaluation under NEPA and CEQA. To complement the second-tier, project-level environmental review of CALFED actions that is anticipated in the Programmatic EIS/EIR, the MSCS identifies a process for development of Action Specific Implementation Plans (ASIPs) to be prepared for each CALFED action or groups of actions as they are proposed for implementation. ASIPs are designed to provide the information necessary to initiate project-level compliance with FESA, CESA, and NCCPA.

Because it is a comprehensive regulatory compliance strategy and is integrated with the Programmatic EIS/EIR, the MSCS helps assure that CALFED can complete actions in accordance with FESA, CESA, and NCCPA, and that the compliance process will be systematic, efficient, and predictable. The MSCS will not give CALFED general authority to take endangered or threatened species. However, the MSCS's compliance process enables CALFED implementing entities to obtain authorizations under FESA and NCCPA that allow incidental take of endangered or threatened covered species caused by specific CALFED actions.

The MSCS serves as the program-level biological assessment for initiating consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under Section 7 of FESA. USFWS and NMFS will prepare a programmatic biological opinion for CALFED actions evaluated in the MSCS based on information presented in the MSCS and other relevant sources. The MSCS will also be submitted to the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) as a programmatic Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP). Based on the MSCS and other relevant information, DFG will determine whether the MSCS complies with NCCPA. If so, DFG will prepare an NCCP approval and issue support findings. As CALFED actions or groups of actions are identified and defined, ASIPs can be prepared that use information and analyses in the MSCS, the programmatic biological opinions issued under FESA, and the programmatic NCCP approval. USFWS and NMFS would then use the ASIPs to prepare action-specific biological opinions and DFG would use the ASIPs as project-specific NCCPs for evaluation and approval.

To serve as a programmatic biological assessment under Section 7 of FESA and a programmatic NCCP under the NCCPA, the MSCS must include an evaluation of potential impacts on specified biological resources of implementing CALFED. To accomplish this, the MSCS:

- identifies and evaluates 244 special-status species and 20 NCCP communities that could be affected by CALFED within the 14 Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) ecological management zones and CALFED's 12 proposed new or enlarged surface reservoir sites;
- identifies conservation goals for each of the 244 evaluated species and 20 NCCP communities;
- identifies two types of conservation measures to assist in achieving species and community goals:
 - measures to avoid, minimize, and compensate for adverse effects on NCCP communities and evaluated species caused by individual CALFED actions and
 - measures to enhance NCCP communities and evaluated species that are not directly linked to CALFED's adverse effects; and
- evaluates the effect of implementing CALFED actions and conservation measures identified in the MSCS for the 244 evaluated species and their FESA designated critical habitats, and 20 NCCP communities.

Implementation of all CALFED actions evaluated in the MSCS and conservation measures over the 30-year project period are expected to result in:

- recovery of populations of 19 evaluated species (i.e., species with a CALFED goal of "recovery");
- partial recovery of populations for 25 evaluated species (i.e., species with a CALFED goal of "contribute to recovery");
- measurable benefits for populations and habitats for 45 evaluated species;
- maintenance of existing levels of populations and habitats for 155 evaluated species;
- substantial increases in the extent and quality of 12 NCCP communities;
- protection, enhancement, or restoration of four NCCP communities;
- minimization of the loss of, with the maintenance or increase of wildlife habitat values provided by, two agricultural NCCP communities (upland cropland and seasonally flooded agricultural lands); and
- minimization of the loss of two natural upland NCCP communities (grassland and upland scrub).